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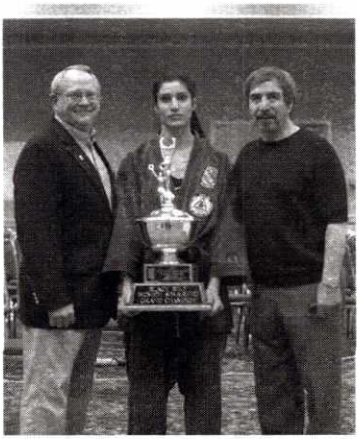
TWO NATIONALS COMPETITORS RETAIN TITLES

By Rick Nathanson, 7th Dan

Among the defending grand champions at the 2004 United States Karate Alliance Nationals, two competitors, Albuquer-que's Anna Chalamidas and Louisiana's Chris Otwell, held on to their titles.

Ms. Chalamidas, 25, won the Grand Champion Women's Black Belt Fighting honors after beating Susan Watts from Louisiana and Tracie McAlister from California. "I felt really good this year because I was looking forward to being a ring general — not only *scoring points, but* making sure the judges see the points," she said. "I was also concentrating on control and not stepping out of bounds, which have been problems in the past."



Anna Chalamidas with Dr. David Jordan & James Hawkes

Ms. Chalamidas knew going in that "both fighters were going to be aggressive." Her strategy was to "meet them in the middle and stay in control," she said. "I just tried to step off the line and get my point. I was working on my reverse pun-ches this year, but they didn't work in these fights. They came in too fast and jammed me."

Ms. Chalamidas won her fight against Ms. Watts, scoring primarily with kicks to the groin and head, and backfists. Her fight against Ms. McAlister, last year's Kata Grand Champion winner, was even more difficult, she said, because "she's one of the strongest fighters I've seen." Nevertheless, Chalamidas pulled it off with a series of round and side kicks, and backfist strikes.

This was Ms. Chalamidas' fourth grand champion win in kumite at USKA Nationals. She also took home Alliance Cup trophies in 2000 and

2001. In 2002 she was disqualified for contact. She came back a wiser, more restrained fighter last year and repeated the accomplishment this year.

Ms. Chalamidas also entered the Nationals kata competition, finishing in third place with her interpretation of "Dannen Sho." In addition, she competed in the women's team fighting event, taking first place along with Albuquerque team mates Teresa Davies and Cassandra Shults.

Chris Otwell with Bruce Heilman

A Shuri Ryu stylist, Ms. Chalamidas has studied karate for seven years under her instructor and fiance Mark Gorman.

Sixteen-year-old Chris Otwell took home two grand champion trophies, one for the Junior Weapons competition and the other for the Junior Advanced Forms competition. These were the same two titles Mr. Otwell won last year, and using the same two forms — "Pyong An Bo" and "Yunbe" — which he has been using for tournament presentation for a number of years.

John Pat Bullock with
Dr. David Jordan & James Hawkes

Mr. Otwell, a junior black belt, is a Tae Kwon Do stylist under Dr. David Jordan and Buster Cotten. He began studying martial arts at age 6 and has been a veteran of the tournament circuit since age 8. "It's a challenge every time," he said. "Sometimes, you get tired of tournaments, but big competitions like Nationals and World are always fun."

Perhaps, the biggest surprise at Nationals was the return of Louisiana's John Pat Bullock, who took the Grand Champion Men's Black Belt Fighting title for the eighth time. In 2001, after his seventh Nationals title win, Mr. Bullock said that he had won the event enough and that he would no longer compete in it.

"I think martial arts training is no different for me than it is for anybody else. It has different stages," he said. "I'm a different fighter than I was three years ago and the way I feel is that that fighter who won seven trophies is still retired."

About two years ago, Mr. Bullock began participating in full contact fighting and "learning some new tricks," he said. "I've been working on using more narrow stances and turning in a circle instead of moving in a very linear way, like I used to do. I've also been working on some

Mr. Bethea retired from the military as a master sergeant in 1981. He subsequently worked for 14 years for the American Electric Power Company. Today, he operates his dojo as a full time endeavor, passing on his knowledge to more than 160 students. It is with mixed feelings that he has observed the changes of karate in America.

"There's not enough to say about what sport karate does for young people and even for some of the older students. But the Budo aspect is what karate is all about and should be all about. If we neglect to train in the Budo aspects, ultimately it will be gone."

Central to the Budo aspects of karate is an intimate understanding of kata and the elements of bunkai: ne waza, or grappling techniques; nage waza, or throwing techniques; kansetsu waza, or joint locks and joint breaking techniques; shimi waza, or choking techniques; and atemi waza, or striking techniques. Sport karate, for all the good it has done, has unfortunately ignored most of these except atemi wazi, Mr. Bethea said.

Part of the problem, he suggested, is the increasing number of young people who are eager to get their black belts so they can open their own dojos — prematurely, perhaps. "And as their classes get filled and their students stretch out into splits and win trophies at tournaments, these instructors feel like they've accomplished something great, even though most have no idea about Budo."

Bringing back Budo "is going to be tough unless it's imparted to those people going out and starting dojos," Mr. Bethea said. And that's where ranking and accrediting organizations, like the United States Karate Alliance, become so important. By raising the bar and maintaining high standards, the USKA is showing "karate-ka" the real meaning of "karate-do."

2004 RULE PROPOSALS THAT PASSED

The 2004 Nationals & Annual Seminar hosted our Annual National Convention where proposals were considered for additions or changes to the USKA Rules. This year, the following proposals were passed:

Proposal 3: Ref. 16 & 16.1.a Label Koshiki as a "safety contact" event rather than a "hard contact" event. A point is a well-executed, medium contact technique. An illegal technique will include "full contact" techniques, techniques with injurious intent, and flailing about wildly.

Proposal 8: Ref. 7.2.d 4th kyu, gup, kup, or grade students will compete in the Advanced divisions if only Beginning and Advanced divisions are offered, and in the Intermediate divisions when Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced divisions are offered. (Eliminating the current rule.)

Proposal 9: Ref. 4.2.e Tots Sparring will be divided into boys and girls.

Proposal 12: Ref. 6.1.b & 4.2 Competitors must compete in the division which fits their current rank. (Competitors may not "compete up.")

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